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Hansel and Gretel
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Carole Glasser Langille

Hansel and Gretel

Day absorbed all their energy
and emptied it into the dark. They broke night's back
walking. Yet even in the woods, lying there,
they felt the privilege
of being with a sleeping person, the comfort of it.

"My love," they imagined
in a voice whispered to a young child,
a voice that would haunt them all their lives.
What they held, what they heard was absence:
a cry in the mouth of the forest.

Nights fused together with nights. Vertebrae hacked open
to let day seep through. When moon rose
branches turned to iron crutches
scraped along the ground by a witch. Who hasn't
been abandoned? Where else this obsession for food?

"We can't keep on," they thought
but didn't speak. Even when the house loomed up
all bread and cake, they must have known
they couldn't rest. Known, hungry as they were,
the sweetness that camouflages other tastes.

These days a brother, a sister, use words
to retrace their steps. It's all love
or mangled love. In time pain changes. But time –
what it takes it removes incompletely
the way a moonless night devours trees,

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the way dark extinguishes a forest.
Despite our ingenuity, the crumbs we drop
are only crumbs. In the dark, we can't see them.
For all a person holds on to, groping in the blackness,
time doesn't want to be touched.

Fear Ghazal

In the form of a black moth
sadness flew out of my body and went off, free.

Old age walks toward me.
I want nothing to do with it, like a teenager ashamed of her
mother.

Once, if nights were cool and a voice said *go in*, I would.
Now nights are cold and I still go out though voices tell me *stay*,
stay.

Father, do you hide your tenderness?
Or are old age and illness all you've been given to face your death?

Having laid your hands on it you know it's ice.
But fear? It disguises itself, the way the ocean burns, freezing
swimmers.

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